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ABSTRACT

Evaluation efforts related to Federal education programs are discussed as to steps that have been taken and the current evaluation plan. Evaluation functions have been centralized in the Commissioner's Office of Program Planning and Evaluation. The two major kinds of evaluation activities that are carried out are (1) monitoring, and (2) effectiveness evaluations. It is concluded that a professional evaluator should be engaged by school systems to provide an independent evaluation of their activities. (DB)

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UTILIZATION OF FEDERAL FUNDING FOR EVALUATION

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UTILIZATION OF FEDERAL FUNDING FOR EVALUATION

There can be little dispute about the great need for hard data on the effectiveness of education programs. However serious efforts at evaluating Federal education programs have only a brief history.

Prior to FY 70 only token amounts were appropriated for evaluating the more than $4 billion spread over 100 programs administered by the Office of Education.

In FY 70, the Congress appropriated $9.5 million for planning and evaluation. This had not been seriously anticipated in light of the previous budgetary history of these requests, and since the appropriation was not passed until three months before the end of the fiscal year, the necessary organization and technical resources to prepare and administer a comprehensive evaluation activity were not in place. A concerted effort was made, however, and a substantial number of needed evaluation studies were initiated.

A more carefully designed evaluation plan was developed in FY 71, and an effort was begun to build a strong evaluation capability in OE. The FY 71 appropriation was $11.3 million, a 20% increase over FY 70, although a number of directed levies and set-asides substantially reduced the amount available for new studies. Thus, FY 72 with approximately the same level as FY 71 represents only the third year of systematic comprehensive evaluation efforts of Federal education programs.

It is obvious that different kinds of evaluation studies are needed to serve different levels of decisions. Project managers need very particularistic information to run their local projects better; program managers need data on the relative effectiveness of different programmatic techniques and strategies to shape the structure of the program and make choices among alternative approaches; and decision makers at the Agency, Administration, and Congressional levels need information about the overall effectiveness of educational programs and expenditures. Here, the needs cover the spectrum of decision makers from program managers in the field, through top management in OE, HEW, and OMB, to the Congress. The

in fact, has legislated that an annual report be made to them on the results and effectiveness of programs administered by the Office of Education. This has been a difficult requirement to fulfill inasmuch as most OE programs have never been subjected to formal evaluation. Thus, special emphasis has been placed in the last two years on evaluations of overall program effectiveness starting with the larger national programs. Major studies are now in progress for example to assess the impact of such programs as ESEA Title I, Emergency School Assistance, Vocational Education State Grant Programs, Teacher Training Programs, Student Assistance Programs, etc.

Our goal in the next few years is to complete formal evaluations of all major OE programs. To this end, our FY 72 evaluation plan continues the major emphasis on the large scale national evaluations of overall program effectiveness.

Reformulating evaluation goals and reorganizing our evaluation efforts are important, but they are relatively easy tasks compared with actually performing evaluation studies, and this difficulty should not be minimized. The past lack of useful evaluations is not due entirely to lack of funds. The total complex of tasks of designing evaluations in the educational area which are truly policy relevant, which will withstand methodological scrutiny, and which can be completed in time to actually affect the problems and decisions to which they are addressed is enoromously difficult. But we have made some substantial advances over the previous state of affairs. Thus, we have developed:

- a comprehensive annual evaluation plan which integrates the needs and inputs from all the Bureaus, the Office of Program Planning and Evaluation, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation;
- We have assembled more technically competent staff to design and direct sophisticated evaluation studies; and
- We are establishing an improved system of getting evaluation results into the larger decision making stream of planning and budgeting.

C. Evaluation Planning Process

Within these limitations the method used to develop the current evaluation plan has been to:

1. Solicit evaluation needs and recommended studies from the Deputy Commissioners.

2. Identify the legislative and program objectives of all major programs.
3. Assess what currently exists in terms of evaluation evidence on each of the programs.
4. Take into account the utility and likely outcome of any relevant evaluation studies underway.
5. Identify the remaining evaluation gaps and needs brought to light by this analysis and contained in the evaluation recommendations from the Deputies.
6. Explore in each case a preliminary design indicating the type and scope of evaluation study needed.
7. Make a priority judgment (on the basis of the priorities noted above) as to which evaluation projects should be launched first and which left for a subsequent fiscal year.
8. Review the selected studies with the affected Bureaus, with ASPE and the Special Committee of the CSSO's.
9. Submit a final proposed plan to the Commissioner and ASPE.

A new step added this year for the first time has been the solicitation of comments and suggestions from the CSSO's through the Special Committee on Coordinating Educational Information.

Since it is not possible to mount all the evaluations that might be desirable, in developing our plans the following kinds of studies are considered of highest priority:

1. Projects which focus on the effectiveness of specific programs, as compared to those which emphasize general data collection.

2. Projects which will supply information for Congressionally mandated evaluation reports.
3. Projects which can be completed in time to affect upcoming legislative renewals.
4. Projects which will contribute to the effectiveness of on-going programs by providing program managers with the information necessary to make internal reallocations of resources.

I indicated earlier that since FY 1970, OE had been working very hard to improve its evaluation capability. Among the steps we took about a year ago to accomplish this, was the critical one of centralizing evaluation functions in the Commissioner's Office of Program Planning and Evaluation (OPPE). Prior to this time, OPPE performed a coordinating function and each Bureau initiated and supervised evaluation of its own programs. This was consistent with the budget structure where each major program area administered by a bureau included a line item for planning and evaluation funds.

We centralized evaluation for a variety of fairly obvious reasons, but first we distinguished between two major kinds of evaluation activities:

1. Monitoring. The evaluation of individual projects through site visits, program information reports, data collections, and other monitoring activities, where the emphasis is on determining the extent to which intended program activities are actually in place and on assessing managerial and operational efficiency.

2. Effectiveness Evaluations. The assessment of overall program impact and effectiveness, where the emphasis is on determining -- usually through fairly elaborate field studies involving before-after measures, control groups, etc. -- the extent to which programs are successful in achieving their basic objectives.

Under the centralization, the responsibility both for preparing the Agency's evaluation plan and for designing and supervising the program effectiveness evaluations was assigned to OPPE. Monitoring activities were left the responsibility of the respective Bureaus.

The reasons for centralization were:

1. That it places the key executive function of determining the effectiveness of our various programs where it should be -- in close relationship with the planning and budgeting functions and directly responsible to the Commissioner.
2. It vests this function in an impartial, non-program-involved, technically staffed office, and thereby avoids the awkward and undesirable situation of having programs evaluate themselves.
3. Such a consolidation provides a better way than the previous arrangement for determining and implementing overall OE evaluation priorities. It avoids the kind of suboptimization which occurs when the funds and initiating responsibility for effectiveness evaluations are dispersed among the various bureaus. There is also the problem of responsiveness to Con-

gressional, Departmental, and Executive Office priorities. It was difficult to be responsive when the responsibility was not centralized.

4. The procedural administration of evaluation funds is improved. The system we used to follow, with its multiple clearances, produced numerous misunderstandings and administrative headaches.

5. Centralizing the responsibility for effectiveneness evaluation both improves and makes more efficient the use of technical evaluation personnel. One of the major reasons the evaluation process has failed so often in the Government is because of the lack of technically qualified people to design and monitor large scale, methodologically complex evaluation studies. The kind of people required to do this job properly -- people with experience and advanced degrees in economics, operation research, statistics, and the behavioral sciences, people with skills in quantitative analysis, benefit/cost analysis, research design and psychological measurement -- are hard to come by. The bureaus, with few exceptions were not adequately staffed with the kind of people required to design and carry out professionally acceptable evaluations. It would be a mistake, we felt, to try to solve this problem by building up multiple evaluation units with this capability throughout the agency, even if it were possible to do so.

6. The external image and credibility of OE's evaluation mechanism was not good; and we believed that if we were going to improve it, as well as improve the mechanism itself, we needed to move in the general direction indicated.

Now that I have made the case for centralization of evaluation in an impartial, non-program involved, technically staffed office, I hasten to add that we have a few exceptions. In two of our major experimental programs, Follow-Through and Experimental Schools, there is a built-in evaluation component. Program funds are earmarked for evaluation purposes to assess the results of the experimental designs. However, the actual evaluations are performed by consultants or other staff not directly administering the programs.

A number of other programs also provide evaluation funds for assessment at the local or project level to improve the management and monitoring of the projects. Included in this group are ESEA Title III, Supplementary Centers, Title VII, Bilingual Program Title VIII, Dropout Prevention, the Drug Abuse Education program, and the Nutrition and Health program. It should be understood that these evaluations do not substitute for the required national evaluations, but are meant primarily to improve the local management of projects.

The principal Federal vehicle for helping improve state and local evaluation capability is ESEA Title V, The total appropriated for this purpose, however, is only $43 million which does not go very far when divided among the 50 states. Thus, we are limited in what we can do in this direction not only by dollars but in manpower to provide meaningfull technical assistance.

I have dwelt at length on the evaluation of Federal education programs, but the same rationale for credibility for independence of audit, and for technical competence applies at the local level. It is clear that under the concepts of

accountability, the public is beginning to demand both that some attempts be made to evaluate educational programs and that they, the public, be informed of the evaluation results. As pointed out by Stenner and Webster in their Educational Program Audit Handbook[1/], "The basic notion is that education agencies, and those educators who are responsible for the effective operation of these agencies, can and should be held responsible for educational outcomes, e.g., children's learning. The notion, rightly or wrongly, that the quality of education can be enhanced by making educators responsible for their product is what seems to make accountability so appealing to many diversified groups."

"One management technique for implementing accountability in education is evaluation. Like the citizen's advisory council and performance contracting movements, the need and impetus for educational program evaluation comes from the public's anxiety for the quality of its children's education. Hence, restoring the public's confidence in public education necessitates a professional evaluation of the product and a professional report of the findings to the public."

It follows that the professional evaluator should be independent of program administration, in a role similar to that of the fiscal auditor. The rationale for this is actually quite straightforward. The school administration is logically assigned the function of gathering and reporting evaluation results, since this information is needed for internal management purposes. The educational evaluator, acting independently and in a professioanl capacity, adds the

1/Educational Program Audit Handbook by A. Jackson Stenner and William J. Webster, The Institute for the Development of Educational Auditing, Arlington, Va. 1971.

credibility to administration's evaluation reports, so that interested third parties may freely rely upon them. The question is not one so much of objectivity as of credibility, since professional evaluators normally are objective by nature of their training.

The quality of the school system's internal evaluation department should not be a factor in determining whether or not to engage an educational evaluator. Just as many corporations have some of the most proficient accountants in the world, so do many school systems possess extremely capable internal evaluators. However, just as corporations engage an independent fiscal audit of their activities, so should school systems engage an independent educational evaluator of their activities. The concept of independent review lends considerable strength to a school board's call for additional resources and additional support.

In conclusion, all education agencies, whether state, federal, or local, are required to provide some evidence of their effectiveness in order to justify the continued support of the public. The public's insistent demands for proof of performance has led to a shift toward comprehensive evaluation. This shift has occurred at a time when the community's confidence in public education is eroding, thereby creating a credibility gap with respect to evaluation results. Those who utilize evaluation results (i.e., the public) may insist that, in the future, evaluation reports have some independent opinion or attestation accompanying them, just as in the financial world, where stockholders have come to expect an independent fiscal audit of a corporation's activities. The opinion of an independent evaluator provides the best possible indication of whether persons not associated directly with the educational process may justifiably rely upon those results in making important decisions regarding public education's future.